

Meeting Minutes  
Delaware Native Species Commission  
August 21, 2019 at 10 am  
Kent County Administrative Building, 555 Bay Road, Dover, Delaware  
Room 221

Minutes approved on: October 16, 2019

**Members Present**

James White, Chair  
Robert Thornton, Vice-Chair  
Lori Athey  
Darin Callaway  
Sarah Cooksey  
Jeffery Downing  
Christopher Heckscher  
Jessica Inhof  
James McCulley  
Michael Petit de Mange  
David Saveikis  
Janice Truitt

**Members Absent**

Michael Costello  
Katherine Holtz  
Ashley Kennedy  
Tracy Surles

**Administrative Staff**

Jennifer Childears, Administrative Specialist III

**Public Present**

Linda Sperry  
Matt Bailey  
Blake Moore  
Jeff Brothers  
Linda Newsome  
Valann Budischak

**Call to Order**

Mr. White called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

**Review and Approval of Minutes**

The commission reviewed the minutes of the June 19, 2019 meeting. There was not a quorum of eligible commission members that had attended the June meeting to approve the meeting minutes, so no motion was made or approved.

### **Unfinished Business**

#### Symposium

Mr. Downing reviewed discussions the educational subcommittee had regarding the symposium. The consensus of the subcommittee was that there needed to be a dedicated individual to organize the ideas of the committee and do the needed leg work to make a symposium happen. To that end, Mr. White proposed Helen Fischel as the organizer. Ms. Fischel had worked with Mr. White at the Delaware Nature Society and has a lot of experience in running these types of events with great success. Mr. White would like to contract Ms. Fischel and pay her \$4,000.00.

The Commission discussed the process for hiring someone. Ms. Truitt asked if any other candidates were considered. Mr. White replied that given the time constraints he did not consider other candidates. Ms. Inhof questioned where Mr. White came up with \$4,000.00 as the rate and Mr. White replied that he had discussed that amount with Ms. Fischel.

Mr. Petit de Mange made a motion, seconded by Mr. Downing, to enter into a contract with Helen Fischel to serve as coordinator for the symposium with a time and materials fee not to exceed \$4,000.00 without further review by the commission contingent on the procurement process and that scope of services will be approved by the Chair, Mr. White and the Chair of the subcommittee, Mr. Downing. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Downing, Mr. White, and Mr. Saveikis will work together to prepare and review the contract.

#### Budget

Mr. Saveikis announced that the Commission received \$22,100.00 of Grant-in-Aid money from the general assembly with no restrictions. Discussion about how money could be spent followed. Ms. Cooksey will apply a percentage of the previously discussed draft budget to the Grant-in-Aid money to use as a guide. Also discussed was if mileage reimbursement could be obtained for the fiscal year 2019 (July 2018 to June 2019). Mr. Saveikis will follow up on that question and Ms. Childears will forward the mileage reimbursement paperwork to the commission members.

#### Public Buildings that are Native Species Centric

Ms. Cooksey did not receive all the information needed to complete the list, which will be referred to as the Mid-Atlantic Native Gardens. Dr. Heckscher will provide information regarding Delaware State University's natural gardens. Mr. White will check the maritime areas for gardens. Ms. Athey mentioned that the Brandywine, Odessa and Claymont Libraries all have native gardens. The list will also note which public gardens have interpretive kiosks or information and which do not. Mr. Callaway noted that DelDOT is pushing for native species use when they redesign landscapes.

Ms. Cooksey will amend the list and present it again in October.

## **New Business**

### Law and Regulations Subcommittee Report

The subcommittee met in August and Mr. Petit de Mange summarized the meeting for the Commission. The subcommittee reviewed the Top Ten list and continued their research on local regulations and plans that are already in place. It's been harder to find local regulations that address native species but the work is almost done and the subcommittee hopes to have a report for the Commission soon.

The subcommittee has also contacted the three Conservation Districts to discuss stormwater management and erosion sediment control and ways to help each other. The districts were receptive to helping in any way they can.

The subcommittee also discussed funding issues and best management practices and discovered some models to present, but felt that this sort of activity fell under the educational subcommittee so they will pass the information over.

New Castle County is launching a new campaign called GreeNNC to promote native plant species use to homeowners. The county is also working on adding education information to its native species plant sites. Sussex County has completed its comprehensive plan and is working on a county-wide ordinance for trees and plants. Kent County is interested in following the lead.

Discussion, in the subcommittee and consequently in the Commission meeting, moved on to creating a certified nursery program for designers, sellers and other people who deal with the retail of native plant species. It was suggested that the certification could come from the Commission. However, Ms. Budischak, a public member, relayed that a certification program does exist and any employee of a garden center can obtain it through the Delaware Nursery and Landscape Association. There is a listing of certified people on the DNLA website and Ms. Budischak will send the link to Ms. Childears to upload to the Native Species Commission website.

It was decided that Mr. Petit de Mange invite Trish Ardt to the next commission meeting for a presentation on the certification program.

Mr. Downing suggested asking the certified people and garden centers if they could also display the *Delaware, Naturally!* tagline and also group native plants together in their stores or somehow create an easier way for consumers to find and purchase native plant species.

### Education Subcommittee Report

Mr. Downing reported that a large number of the recommendations for the Commission deal with education. Mr. White and Ms. Kuehn, a public member, will be working together to create a tabletop display that Commission members can take to statewide environmental events (meetings, conferences and so on) to begin spreading the word about the Commission and educating the public about native species. Mr. Downing also encouraged the Commission to begin thinking about a long term strategic plan.

Ms. Gillis, Mt. Cuba Center Fellow, presented to the Commission her work on developing a community program designed to encourage homeowners to plant and maintain native species in their gardens and communities. The program focused on behaviors and thought processes of homeowners and worked to encourage them to change their landscape and garden habits to be more native plant species centric. Ms. Gillis talked about researching and identifying the motivating factors of homeowners, what messages about native plant species work best and what barriers are present. For example, showing homeowners the beauty of native plants and discussing how using native plants have long-reaching effects on their neighborhoods helps homeowners want to use native plants. The program sought to create “Neighborhood Ambassadors,” trustworthy neighbors that would rally the community along the native plant route. The program was done with neighborhoods closest to the Mt. Cuba Center, but there are plans to expand the program out further in the coming years.

#### Top Ten Tasks

Mr. White noted that the Commission has worked on at least eight of the Top Ten but noted that numbers 4- Encourage the preservation of the remaining intact forest habitat (largest tracts should receive highest priority) (Incentivizing Private Landowners); and 8- Encourage protection of Delaware’s rarest plant communities such as Atlantic White Cedar Swamps, Coastal Plain Ponds, Interdunal Swales, Sea-level Fens, Piedmont Streamside Seepage Wetland, and Piedmont Tuliptree Rich Woods (Legislation Affecting Development) have not been addressed.

Regarding number 4, Mr. White commented that the Commission needs to start looking for incentive programs and Mr. Downing responded that he was recently assigned to chair a task force for New Castle County’s government on the preservation of Agriculture land with easements and open space. The task force has a year to come up with recommendations so his work there might carry over to the Commission. Ms. Truitt mentioned that the Delaware Agriculture Land Foundation, which she is a representative of, is responsible for providing easement and forestry assistance for all 3 counties and perhaps the Commission can utilize their help.

Regarding number 8, Mr. White noted that DNREC’s Division of Fish & Wildlife has a list of endangered native species but there are no legal protections of those species. A question was raised if a tour could be created to visit some of the places mentioned or have photographs of the areas. Mr. White noted that he could do a presentation and then perhaps guide a field trip to some locations.

Ms. Truitt recalled a program that DNREC’s Division of Fish & Wildlife ran where the division would supply tree saplings to the public. Mr. Saveikis noted that the program ended when federal money was removed but perhaps the Department of Agriculture has a similar program. Mr. Saveikis went on to note that several forest areas are not covered by any foundation or government protection program and they should be. Ms. Truitt mentioned that there should be some state funding to help citizens buy and maintain native plant species. Mr. White noted that some NGOs have programs to help but he would have to look up ones that do.

Dr. Heckscher questioned if both items could be highlighted in the symposium some way to help further education on the topics.

Ms. Cooksey stated that there needs to be more legislation and funding and she mentioned strategic planning again. Mr. White noted he had never done a strategic plan internally before, that people were always brought in to facilitate. He does not know what the process looks like. Ms. Cooksey has some experience in this area and will put some information together. Mr. Downing noted that the plan needs to have clear objectives, such as funding for scientific knowledge, citing the loss of knowledge when Bill McAvoy retires and having funding for the state to hire an equally competent botanist to continue the work. Mr. White noted that the Commission could be tasked with helping to fund Fish & Wildlife programs. Mr. Saveikis noted that the Recovering America's Wildlife Act is in Congress and designed to help with funding.

Ms. Cooksey also suggested that a member of the Commission attend the Open Space Council meetings to advocate and Mr. White agreed he would attend. The next meeting is Sept 4 and 9 am at Legislative Hall.

#### Legislation

Mr. Saveikis reviewed SB 84 which was passed during the last General Assembly session. This bill expands the Commission from 15 to 19 members, adding the Secretary of the Department of Transportation (or her designee), a botanist, a member representing an environmental organization or educational institute and a member representing commercial or farming interests. Darin Callaway has been appointed as the designee from DelDOT. The remaining members have not been appointed at this time. Mr. White will reach out to Lydia Massey in the Governor's Office for a status update on the remaining members.

Mr. Saveikis also spoke about the Invasive Plant Ban bill that Senator Hansen was going to introduce during the last session but decided to hold it until the Delaware Invasive Species Council completed updating their list of invasive species. DISC should be completing the list in early October. March 2020 would be the latest to submit a bill for the upcoming session.

#### Goals for 2019

Mr. White noted that the Commission is making progress on all the goals established and is positive that they will be met. Commission members discussed the importance of educating the public and securing funding for future projects.

#### **Other Business**

Ms. Childears reminded Commission members about an invitation, extended by Senator Hansen, to a meeting with the Department of Education and Senator Hansen to discuss a possible education curriculum based on the work of the Delaware Native Species Commission. Mr. Downing noted that he would be attending this meeting on Sept. 4.

#### **Public Comment**

Blake Moore with the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension announced a Master Naturalist Training Program the Extension is promoting. The goal is to have an educated group of trained volunteers to help environmental and government agencies reach their goals. The program is looking for volunteers and if anyone is interested, please get in touch with him.

Matt Bailey expressed his kudos to the Commission for the work they are doing and suggested that Bill McAvoy join the Commission in the botanist role.

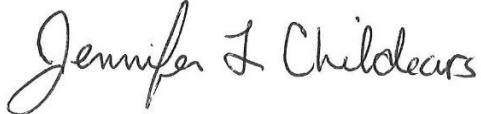
**Next Meeting Date and Location**

The next meeting is scheduled for October 16, 2019, in Room 220 at 10:00 am.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:44 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer I. Childears". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Childears, Administrative Specialist III  
DNREC, Division of Fish & Wildlife